

A Collection of Poems by Dan Bruiger

GO FLY YOUR KITE!

Do we not fly experience like a kite,
on the string of attachment
in the wind of desire
on the beach of solitude
under the kind but stern
eye of the Absolute?

MAINS-TENANTS

I fall back into the arms of God
that hold me secure like great fluffy clouds
on those warm summer days when children
jumped with glee into the billowy blue sky.
God held me to the bosom of my mother,
I took his hand crossing the street with Dad.
Never did I worry for the goodness of each day
as those arms held me savoring my worth.
Now invisible, they still catch me when I fall.

Je retombes dans les bras du Bon Dieu
qui me tiennent secure-- grands nuages de coton
les beaux jours de l'été quand les enfants

sautaient heureux dans le lit vaste du ciel.
Le Seigneur me confortait au sein de ma mère,
me tenait par la main fière de mon Papa.
Jamais je ne doutais la bonté de chaque jour
ni refusais la promesse de tout moment.
Ces bras, invisibles maintenant, me soutiennent
toujours. Il n'y a pas de chute possible.

BRHATI'S OFFERING

I offer you, O mortal man, my golden nectar
of excruciating heart, the silver of remorse,
the restless mauves of passion and violet throbs of rage,
the red declarations of despair, the black of unrequited sex,
the false white of imagined securities.
These are my hues-- yours to mix and match,
artistic license to kill or cure!

Play with these , O man-- try these effects
of light and dark, of depth and perspective.
Make unto me a living portrait
that I may be satisfied
you have received my gifts.
Learn to work this palette lovingly,
for here beckons a taste of freedom.

O man, I call out of thee my truest consort,
clothed in radiance, a sun to all,
the pillar of my power and varied subtlety.

On me he showers unwavering devotion
that I may give to all this coloured life.
Endure these trials, that you be purified
and come unto me, O my man!

LOVE IN L.A.

Is it only airline wine talking--
bubbles of love potion bursting
in the blood at 40,000 feet?
So softly, strangely overwhelming
to the mind, this life in the body.
So curious and adoring
of the mystery in these others!
Is it all just chemicals--
the whole of life and memory's traces,
the magnetic lines of beauty,
the force fields of passions,
cells bathed and renewed
in each other's fluids?

Is it the intoxicating balm
of orange blossom and rose
rising above traffic,
permeating smog in the stillness before crime,
penetrating fake indoor courtyards
with fluorescent light and fabric flowers
in this paved-over paradise
made safe for fast food franchises?

Not even the mind can live here
yet bodies keep trying.
A lizard suns himself. A hummingbird dives.
In the distance, the faint sounds of barking seals
mingle with the howl of sirens and neighborhood dogs
as all the sun beats down.

Is it the parched spirit talking
from dried up loins, from pointless lineages,
my father's desperation to fulfill
his filial duty, the one reason
for holding back the orgasm of death?

Does a secret faith abide
whispered from gene to gene
in Granny's sun-drenched yard
on the edge of the ravine,
with its sweet scents and optimistic birds
and relentless ivy that hasn't heard
the news for a million years,
where a child giggles on the other side?

NIGHT CRAWLERS

Sir Isaac Newton sought the divine in outer space,
not in the hearts of infidels and counterfeiters.
He discovered gravitation, if not love;
force, if not philanthropy; the nature of light,

but never the darkness in his own nature.
As a boy his mother left him high and dry--
an empirical fact no one then could study.

Astronomers today have new ideas.
What a discovery, then, the obscure band
down the middle of the Milky Way,
black within white within night.
These are the dark mother clouds
where stars are born, and to which
they return their dust, all light spent--
each photon, however, a ship in a bottle,
endless messages lapping on distant shores.

Star do talk to one another!
They tell their life stories,
recount long gestations, brilliant careers,
explosive mid-life crises, and the slow
contraction back into original wisdom.
They stick together through it all-- this heavenly host--
a gathering to chatter up God's sorrows,
holding each other's grave attentions while
the whole wheel crawls on its belly toward a new day.

BEWARE!

(all this in parenthesis
to save you embarrassment,
knowing you would prefer

I speak of God
point to the moon
praise the beauties of this
and other worlds...
anything but hold your gaze
and tell you, you are the one
who incarnates
all this I treasure)

DEBRIS

The salty warmth of our two cheeks
so urgently pressed for salvage
these bodies marooned in the shipwrecked night
cast adrift in a sea of need

YOU KNOW THIS

Strong and swift the current flows,
self-renewing, cool and fresh.
The tree stands sturdy on the bank,
hearty with sap, roots dug in
longingly beside the water.
Dead leaves combed out by wind
settle on the stream. Sorrows and angers
ripple down the river that never steps twice.
The bough bends in the breeze and does not break.
the river flows by itself, and ever flows.

PEARL BEYOND PRICE

The heart creeps at a snail's pace,
leaving a trail of jewels to mark the path,
neither raw sense nor brittle shell,
another creature altogether
powerful yet armorless,
turned inside out,
wriggling softness surrounding
an irritating remnant of hope.
Good to clam up, protect
what you think you are.
Better still this grain should become a pearl!

BROTHER SUN

Winking over the wrinkled hills,
the sun's eye cannot check his joy,
nor from desire but from what he is
spills light the whole earth over.
A second sun greets the first
rising in vaulted skull
illuminating wrinkled brain.
In the lull of a moment,
made of common flame,
these two watch over you
just over your horizon.

BUS STOP

Are the sun's first rays really so dramatic
or is waiting for the sun like waiting for the bus?
Is sunrise a thing at all or is it endless,
embracing day before, day after,
kissing the wife goodbye,
having coffee with the boss?
The moment seems so singular--
the metallic flash, the jingling sound
of tumbling fare. But when you
put your foot on the step do you wonder
where sunrise is going in its long haul?
Or whether you will even get there
or be forever waiting, transfer in hand?
The earth groans through space
stopping for all who want to board
its lumbering path to release.
The sun also wanders, and the galaxy,
and probably the Whole Shooting Match,
drifting, drifting in grace.

Then such scurry for sunset, we rush-hour lemmings!
Do tired eyes even notice the parting rays?
There is not only beauty and truth
at the end of the line.
But along the way: tedium,
chewing gum on the back of the seat,

the careening joy ride polymorphously perverse,
the tender viscous passage
thick and sweet as the interstellar medium,
home from the dance on the late night earth.

BALANCE

Joy hath no itinerary, but like some bored
mischievous god roams the earth a hungry ghost
sneaking up on unsuspecting victims.
Out of the blue another heart is fingered,
laid bare by indiscriminate love!
Egos dropping off like flies, what carnage!
Suffering gone the way of dinosaurs.
Dancing in imagination's streets.
Bygones gone by at last, masks flung off,
costumes unbuttoned after the closing act,
heroes and villains slapping each other's backs,
the whole cast partying the long night of the soul!

Six billion angels dancing on the head of a pin...
Who'll answer the telephone
turn the wheels of progress
win the lottery?
When the whole cosmic egg winds itself
back into unfertilized singularity,
the Big Bang unbanged,
will there be room to dance
will there be space for lovers to long across

for Adam's finger to wriggle up
toward God's tendered hand?

ZENO'S LESSON

Time slides like blood home to the heart.
I want to run after, call out wildly,
shield you from apocalypse, never part,
put a finger in the dyke of doubt.
Though I enfold you in love's rapture
I cannot spare you the pain
even of my calloused way!
Though I take you in my arms today
I cannot detain you from destiny.
A man in the desert am I drawn to your waters.
A mirage, you reappear in the distance.
Though I hold the hourglass in hand,
not mine to keep: all the sand
of the dunes slips though grain by grain.
Not one moment is captured.
Should the river freeze
it's but myself turned to stoney sleep.

YOU'LL NEVER KNOW

How deep this spring you've tapped
from which tears well not of sadness only
nor contemplated loss, but a tide of sea-feeling

across time rushing to join your waters
your stars and mine tugging on puppet heartstrings
wringing from our cloths the oils of understanding
pain's bulldozers clearing the wild way
on the path overgrown between us
man and woman at work, two nerves wandering
like lightning in the brain of life toward synapse
two halves of a mold burning out in the sacrificial fire
two rafts becalmed in the storm's eye
waiting for favorable wind
knowing love's tide pushes always in again

OFFENSIVE METAPHORS

Desire seeps like melting butter
between my stack of hot-cake ribs,
emanates microwaves through astral space
to baste you in the spreading stain
of first winter light, an egg yolk
broken at the crack of dawn
onto love's well-oiled griddle.

The morning after love has crushed you,
idolled you in its many-armed embrace,
you scramble to put humpty together again
on the far side of the bed. The riddle is:
Like all else in the end, what falls
into love's black hole,
from the frying pan into the fire?

SURRENDER

In this hand-to-hand combat
I've no weapon against you.
Each time you run me through
with your stiletto beauty
I stagger, uncomprehending.
The fists of your laughter
pound sweetly on my fainting heart,
your glance tears blood away
from brain cells dedicated to survival.
Your odors claw at my desire,
the rays of your softness
sear my flesh. Will I not dissolve
in the onslaught of your caress?
Will not even this bone of an ego
be swallowed without contention
in the utter delicacy of a kiss?

ODYSSEY

Happily he lashed himself--
to the great toothed wheel of fate--
all the better to hear the sirens' call!
Already mad with desire,
drunken with the urge to fall
overboard into the machinery of love--

too late! Let him have his shipwreck,
be cast up on your shore.
Let his salty lips awaken at your feet--
that is the pilgrimage he longed for,
your body his quest for truth.

ON USELESS GESTURES

Some words are not hammers.
Neither are they arms
to comfort, to cling, but are space itself--
the emptiness of the open door,
the place set for the unexpected guest.
In the beginning was pure stammering light:
the word fallen flat on its face.
But in the first second of the universe
who could have guessed butterflies and birds,
voices to sing or hearts moved by song?

SPECIATION

You, gliding joyously in the upper currents,
with the slightest cock of your wizened eye
take in continents I cannot imagine
in my earthbound stride. Do you see me
far below, scrambling to follow your shadow
across the tide pool bottom?
What can I offer you, regal bird,

but crustacean ease
in the intimacy of denser worlds?

REGRET

Flashes of the night of shooting stars
one earth year ago.
Your silhouette, your voice
streak through darkened memory
meteors brief as shadows cast by lightning...
now count the seconds to the crash of loss
relentless as thunder.
Throbbing to share this sensuous night
to hear your pleasure sparked
at such a bright one before your sleepy eyes.
And me, proud to have stumbled out here
arm-in-arm to show you feral tricks
groomed the whole year long
for this one fleeting audience

ASTRONAUT

The break of smiles
over your face awash with sleep
the deep blue summer sky arching its cloudless back
in imitation of your endless stretch
your own starstruck backside lovely as summer nights
disengaging in the golden light

from winter cloud covers
a little more each dawn a widening swath
of night-blooming jasmine-scented flesh
pleasant as evening crickets
smooth as warm milk and drambuie
a dizzying confusion of little brown stars
floating to pythagorean music
down a negative of the milky way
the nerve-stripping tease of springtime
calling out to the unsteady hand of man
resting on the pillow beside you
to reach for the stars:
one small leap from such outer space

STRONG AND LOFTY

How I love to lie awake beside
your sleeping beauty, kissing your face
with my eyes as the sages contemplate
their waterfalls, speechless, breathless!
You are the little notes I leave myself,
the trail of bread crumbs in the tangled forest
because you cannot be forgotten
because you are the thundering rush of beauty
pouring from the void into the void

THE TOUCH

Make no mistake about love.
This world vows silence,
where my body is the slate on which
your chalk tenders its wordless message.
I am charmed by the poetry of your touch.
I am touched by the charm of your poetry.
I am poeticized by the close encounter
of your charm.
Does blackboard desire chalk?
Where is this you, this I
at the point of contact,
in the moment of love spelled out
in God's unmistakable hand?

For Hal...

What a fine day to die!
first thought I, sipping the cool
dry aperitif of strange news
passed like a tray of hors d'oeuvres
among conviviais seated on the terrace--
all waiting, by the sea in the stark evening sun,
each and every one, to be served
his own unsuspecting last supper.

There go I -- my second thought--
into that furled water's brisk

as I too did there, in the afternoon
of other days, this time to swim
on and on against current and wind
that always blew one back to shore,
out of reach now and unheeding
the siren voice of the familiar.

Third thought: do not mourn
an old glove found upon the beach,
nor regret this tunnel through ambiguities--
void passing through void
toward inevitable surrender (to what?)
Unlived life grieves all abandoners,
and is faithful in its little tricks
to rearrange priorities.

I walk out upon the gravelly spit,
Sit on a log to watch
the waters merge like highway lanes.
Here the road ends (think I lastly).
The eye travels on single file
toward that vanishing point
where shifting tides meet
and new journeys begin.

LIGHT

in dancing laceworks wafts
through crests of undulating glass
lulling over the duny bottom

as warm breeze meets water's edge
patterns playing also behind the eye
in the brain that invents seeing
and again in the soul's enchantment
at these delicately layered lappings

LIGHT

crystallized from void, aboriginal
as morning dew on a rose unfurling
light breathes through pores of nothing
passes through and through
the tie-dyed silken skein of existence
through gelatinous films of thought, grain by grain--
for your eyes only-- this incredible sound-and-light show
the magic lantern of a captive hour
where seeing is believing
the dance of seven zillion veils
the greatest show on earth

LIGHT

holds you in its hand
O movie goer and star!
you shine with the light of its light
and when the last footage flickers through
your silver-screen career toward whiteout
you will know beyond all doubt you are
that intensity itself-- the very thrust of life
the scintillation on the seascape
the iridescent flash in the dewdrop
the gleam in the eye

of this luminous flea of a world
crawling through the dark fur of eternity

For Jack...

GRAVITY SUCKS

They say you can't take it with you:
money, fame, pleasure, pain, dignity...
Exits, like entrances, are naked, squishy, abject, absolute.
Though anticipated, always surprising
like the urgent telegram that makes you leave all behind
in haste, like the car abandoned at the side of the road.

Even the distillate of memory is too thick
too heavy to evaporate with soul's humours.
Levity alone rises to the occasion.
Four score years of keeping it up draws one vertically
in the crossfire between matter and spirit,
stretched, then stretching toward final ends,
each time with fresh eyes of surrender
and feet planted firmly in the soil of beginnings.
Gravity teaches balance.

Then one day an angel jumps out of the bush
to wrestle you finally to the ground.
What can you say in that summary instant?
"Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace..."?
Or: *"Have you got a moment, buddy--
there's something I'm dying to discuss..."?*

More likely: a gleam in the eye,
as grappling cedes to embrace;
and the crack of a wry smile
that has all eternity to spread

INVITATION TO THE DANCE

I would dance with you
in a steady elevator to heaven
through still silent snowfall
or cheek to skinny dipping cheek
in the sultry eye of a hurricane.

I would pause to sway with you
as trees grown together windward of music,
limbs poised to migrate cell by cell.

I would crawl with you
through the snail love of carousel giraffes,
cavort with you on adolescence' lost savannah.

Time would lapse as stars arc to follow
the rush of clouds toward declining light.

I would spin with you
through recorded space
galactic arms entwined
in the repose of unspoken familiarity
thick as blood, in close embrace...

OUT OF SEASON

Whatever muse he dreams upon
I too know, by another name.
For now I share his secret smile--
the ivory sage upon the desk
wrapped in centuries of saffron bliss,
insinuating joy unseasonal
as tender shoots in hothouse soil
that untimely care arouses,
green and innocent of dinning rain.
Such starts defy the winter pulse;
for vain are new beginnings if
the gardener's toil tends not destiny
in humid hearts as in glass houses.

NIGHT AIRE

through the open window
cold night air
pulls a smile over the world,
the whole works: a moment of breath suspended
between the tic and the toc,
myriad crystallized galaxies
scattering like snowflakes
turned upside down

this breeze, I think, is driven
by the very spring that moves the world and joins all things,
poised between a snap and dissipation,
the endless reverie after (or before)
the truly big bang

for all the faces, I couldn't find you then
cramped in the great rewinding,
knowing you were there
interlaced in this common world where
space is a strange dream of separation
and time the riddle of the cake
both had and eaten.

Only now is there perspective--
room enough to see,
to touch you across,
tinged unavoidably with longing

PENELOPE

The hired hand shovels-in the wellspring
that bleeds from the world's foundations.
There is a path that reaches round
the dark side of the moon; each
footfall masks a stifled cry
behind closed window.
Listen to the tune.

There is a thing grown hard with time,
its coarse hand over the white throat
it scarcely recognizes as its own.
You can hear the gasp for air
fainting with tenderness...

A song is handed down
in the lithe bodies of children
and the wails of crones.
A tale yet plainly to be whispered
through the baritone lines of history,
a clouded vision gathering
behind mournful eyes.

Never bite the hand that rocks the world;
the one you cradled in your breast
and groomed to be the wonder of the earth...
Look at him now, racing to mars
no hands on the handlebars,
a hungry ghost!

And therefore shall Penelope
unwarp the thread that's hers to weave,
the pattern unimagined yet by nature
or the lethally prosthetic hand of man.
She would rather sing in moonlight,
by the ancient spring. And
what she wills, she can.

MUSE

The sheer wonder of being here
attacks always unexpectedly
like a sniper in a shopping mall;
gone when you turn to face your assailant.

There is always an altar, empty,
in the temple of conundrums called love,
where no man can enter without
fashioning an idol, a pretext for surrender.

If longing stalks you, don't
report it to the heart police;
innocent names will be named, a culprit found.
Not even God is above suspicion.

To be an intransitive verb, an audience
for unconjugated desire... That is the question,
or on stage to fake intransigence? Either way,
soon enough the theatre will be dark!

If my eyes chase your ankles adoringly
across the floor, if my hand wanders
too often back to yours; how else to embrace
this fervor that demands to be danced?

COMING ABOUT

I retrace your footfalls
on ephemeral sands,
bejeweled impressions sparkling
between dark undertows.

See the steps abruptly overwash
as though the music stopped,
the dancer rapt away,
leaving the astonished cheek,
the crush of warm embrace
emptied like a sail becalmed.

Wind knows its business
but luffs and flusters
when tack is too direct,
uncertain which side to rush upon.
The sailor too is breathless
poised to come about
on the sea of endless miracles

ALWAYS

I thank all the gods I'll never know
for the joy of moving with you
to feel your heart beat in step
close against mine, as though
the big sad world had disappeared
and there were only love to fill hearts

and simple tasks to fill minds

I am grateful, too, for bliss
whose sudden stabs of absence
of overflowing shorn away
recall that final theft
that there is only this
brief oasis whose clever sands
no brittle plot withstands

I bless this wakeful sap
that hazards time has mercy after all
that players chance to meet
on unknown stages, benignly cast
with rhyme if not with reason,
that in another season
there will always be
one more dance...

CRYPTIC MESSAGE

By gathering phosphenes
dropped overboard in space
landlocked astronomers surmise
life histories of stars
long before there were eyes.

Their beacons, too, beam love
to the reaches of the skies...

in case someone's looking
by the time light arrives
bobbing in its petty pace.